



Non-governmental Organizations

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Overview

- What is an NGO?
- Types of NGOs
- Roles that NGOs play in today's world
- Accomplishments
- Criticisms
- Realities of doing development work
- Conclusions



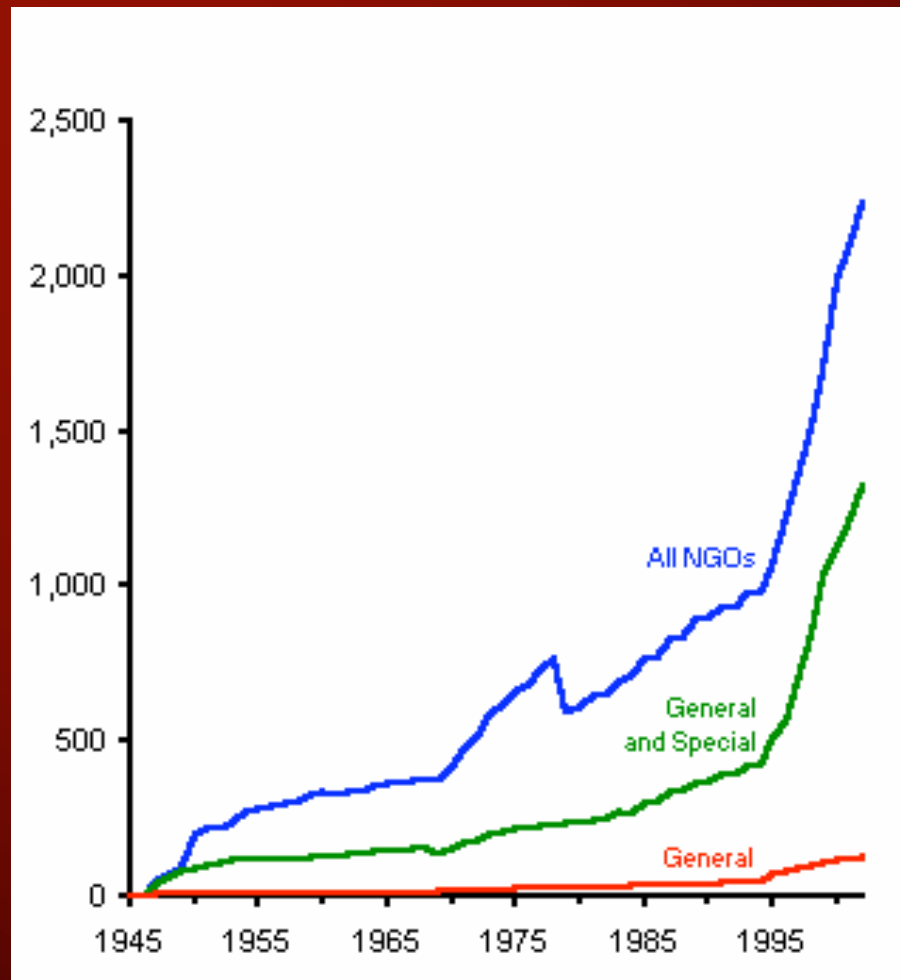
What is an NGO?

- No single accepted definition, but...
- Generally, a private body that is independent of government control and not seeking to challenge government for political control as a political party
- Address issues in the interest of the “public good” (as defined by group)
- Non-profit, non-criminal, and non-violent (according to UN standards)
- They rely on a mix of donations and grants (both private and public), volunteer labor, money-generating activities
- NGOs are not just liberal or leftist organizations; many represent conservative and right-wing interests too!

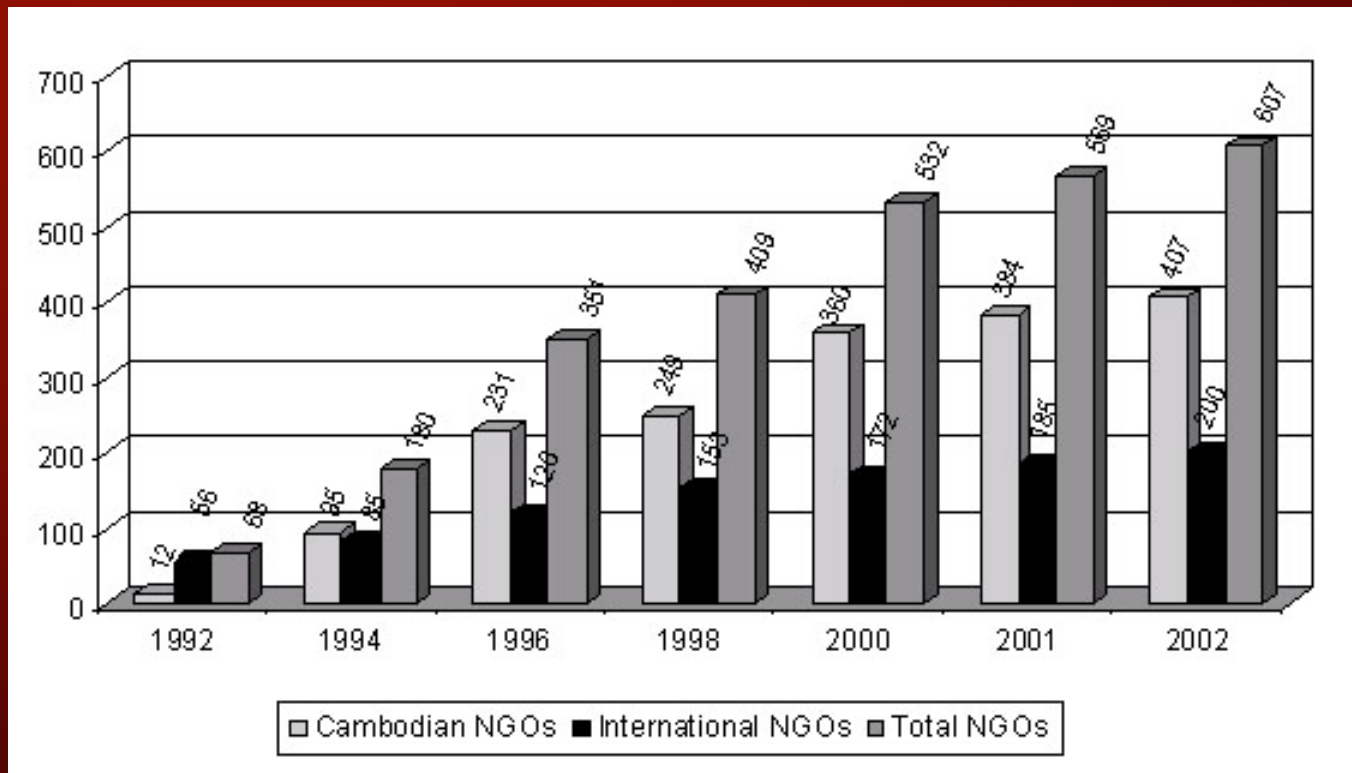
Massive Proliferation Recently

- Important to realize that this is not the first time that transnational “civil society” has grown rapidly (same thing happened just before WWI and WWII, but both times there was a major collapse)

NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council for each Year, 1945-2002



Number of NGOs in Cambodia



Where are NGOs from?

- It is widely assumed/stated that NGOs are largely a “Western” or “Northern” phenomenon (i.e., a form of cultural hegemony or neoimperialism)
- This is not the case—NGOs have independently emerged all around the world
- What is true is that the best funded and most globally powerful NGOs tend to have direct ties to the global “West” or “North”
- It is important to look beyond dominant media images of NGOs to find out what they really do on the ground

What do NGOs Do?

- Advocate particular political, social, or economic positions
- Lobby governments at the local, regional, national, and international level
- Provide consultative services at the local, national, or international level (e.g. the UN)
- Provide crucial social services either in cooperation with, or in place of, the state
- Engage in economic development, education, and capacity building at the local, regional, national, or international levels
- Provide emergency assistance at the local, regional, national, and international level
- Engage in “self help”



Organization

- NGOs come in all shapes and sizes
- Massive transnational/international organizations Secular: Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, International Planned Parenthood Federation, CARE, etc.)
Religious: Catholic Charities, World Vision, Lutheran World Relief, Mormon Church, etc
- National organizations (usually with centralized headquarters that coordinates activities of local branch offices)
- Regional and local organizations (state, province, city, village); especially “self help” groups
- Some NGOs are very well run, but others are not



Networking

- Recently, there has been an increase in networking among NGOs at all levels
 - o so, a “local” NGO in the South Pacific that works on women’s reproductive issues might strategize with another “local” NGO in East Africa
 - o huge protests against the WTO (Seattle, 1999) and other transnational governance bodies coordinated through NGO networking

“Grassroots”

- Almost all NGOs claim to be “grassroots” organizations at some level, meaning that their direction and ideology are determined from the bottom up rather than imposed from the top down
 - IMHO, it’s important to be skeptical of any individual or organization that claims to speak for “the people”
- The extent to which NGOs are made up of ordinary people varies tremendously
- Sometimes the groups that are most connected with ordinary people are created by outsiders
- One can’t assume anything about NGOs in this respect—when you work with them or donate to them, you have to take the time to find out for yourself what the power structure is like...

“North-South” Partnership

- There are extreme power imbalances between people and organizations from the global West/North and most people and organizations in developing communities (education, access to resources, culture, etc.)
- Forming partnerships is seen as a way to help redress these imbalances, but many researchers argue that these relationships often perpetuate inequalities (see, e.g., INTRAC [web address on last slide])



“South-South” Partnerships

- Recently, we have seen the rise of international NGOs that are based in developing countries and have missions to help people in other developing communities
 - Reach Out to Asia is an excellent example
 - Based in Qatar, with a mission to improve the quality of education for all across the Asian continent

Value of NGOs

- Mobilization and organization of ordinary people to demand political change
- Counterweight to the impersonal forces of govt. bureaucracy and globalization → local ownership and interest
- Increasingly a source of ideas and claims about how the world ought to be
- Creation of a global “human rights” culture, thanks to NGOs at all levels, from HRW and AI to the tiny organizations that collect information about violations on a shoestring budget
- Provide services that the government cannot or will not provide

NGO-government partnerships

- Some of the most innovative development work is taking place at the intersection of NGO-government cooperation
 - NGOs supplement services provided by government (e.g., health care or health information), stretching the money that each spends
 - Governments can act as customers/consumers for NGO initiated activities
 - Governments and NGOs can each tackle different aspects of a particular problem (e.g., environmental degradation or conservation work)

Criticisms

- Neoliberalism
- Performing vital services that ought to be done by government
- Lack of accountability and transparency (i.e., they are not subject to the same kinds of checks and balances as the state)
- some big NGOs have massive budgets and/or high administrative costs
- Tend to focus on one issue too narrowly or suffer from “mission creep”
- NGOs are often consulted as a substitute for true democratic engagement, especially at the transnational level
- Big international NGOs suck resources and glory from smaller local NGOs, creating a new kind of dependence

Discussion of Pandya Article

- According to Pandya, why have NGOs becoming an increasingly important part of the development landscape in the past few decades?
- How can one characterize the relationship between citizen and state?
- Is it the case the NGOs are increasingly carrying out activities that are the responsibility of the state?
- If so, how can one characterize the relationship between citizens and NGOs?
- Why, according to Pandya does it matter?

Authority without accountability



Importance of NGOs

- Whatever their faults, it is generally beneficial to partner with NGOs when you're doing development work in communities that are not your own
 - They have established ties with the local community
 - They (hopefully) know the culture and business practices
 - They sometimes have a sense of what projects have been done in the past and what has made them failures, successes, or something in between
- Imagine life in the United States without the Red Cross, Catholic Charities or Salvation Army



NGO Resources

- Generally see the partner list at OneWorld.net for a nice list of development-oriented NGOs:
<http://us.oneworld.net/section/us/partners>
- Directory of Development organizations:
<http://www.devdir.org/index.html> (seems to give a fairly complete listing of *major* NGOs working in a particular country or region)
- Peace Corps NGO Training Manual:
http://www.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/library/M0070_all.pdf
- INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre): <http://www.intrac.org/>

